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BIOGRAPHICAL

Memoirs

OF THE LATE

THOMAS PERCIVAL, M. D.

F. R. S. & A. S. Lond. F. R. S. & R. M. S. Edin. &c. &c.



MIHI QUIDEM, QUANQUAM EST SUBITO EREPTUS, VIVIT TAMEN,
SEMPERQUE VIVET. VIRTUTEM ENIM AMAVI ILLIUS VIRI,
QUÆ EXTINGTA NON EST. NEC MIHI SOLI VERSATUR ANTE OCU-
LOS, SED ETIAM POSTERIS ERIT CLARA ET INSIGNIS. Cicero.

“ Αποθανών ἔτι λαλεῖται.” EBP.



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1804.



BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF THE LATE

THOMAS PERCIVAL, M. D.



"Monthly Magazine," Nov. 1804.

IT is with peculiar concern that we announce to the public the loss of so estimable a member of society as Dr. Percival, of Manchester, who, after an illness of but eight days continuance, breathed his last on the evening of Thursday the 30th of August, at the close of the 64th year of his age. The severity of his disorder, which was occasionally accompanied with excessive pain, he supported with fortitude and composure; fully aware, throughout, of the approach of dissolution, he looked forward to that awful event with tranquil acquiescence. Those animating hopes with which he had always rested, in humble confidence, upon the mercies of his God, enabled him to contemplate death without dismay; and his last moments were marked with that elevated serenity and pious resignation which well became the conclusion of a life, in which the great duties of a Man and of a Christian, had been conscientiously discharged.

In every thing that relates to the history and character of a person so extensively known, and so deservedly beloved, the public will naturally feel a lively curiosity ; and we lament that we are at present unprepared to meet this laudable desire with any other than a hasty and imperfect sketch of both. It is, however, to be hoped, that a more lengthened Memoir may be given of the interesting particulars of a life, in which there is so much to stimulate to moral and intellectual improvement, so much to recommend and inspire the love of virtue and decorum, and so much to exemplify the rewards of rectitude, and the consolations of religion.

Thomas Percival was born at Warrington, September the 29th, N. S. 1740. His parents, Joseph and Margaret Percival, both highly respectable in their conduct, endowments, and descent, having died at the same time ;* he was placed, at the age of four years, under the protection of his uncle, Dr. Thomas Percival, a physician of learning and consideration, resident in Warrington. But being deprived likewise of his parental guidance at the age of ten, the sole care of him thenceforward devolved upon his oldest sister, from whose kind, assiduous, and judicious

* It is a singular and melancholy fact, that the dissolution of the wife was preceded but a few hours by that of her husband, whose health had been gradually undermined by the sorrow which her long and painful illness had excited ; and that the remains of both were interred at the same moment in the parochial church yard, at Warrington.

attentions he continued to experience most of the benefits of parental superintendence, and whom he never after ceased to regard with the highest sentiments of gratitude, and a tenderness approaching to filial veneration.

His education commenced at a private school in the neighbourhood of Warrington. From this he was, in his eleventh year, transferred to the Free Grammar School of that town, in which he gave such striking promise of industry and talent as secured to him the particular regard and affection of the principal, Mr. Hayward, a teacher eminently distinguished for his abilities and scholastic acquirements.

On the institution of the Warrington Academy, in 1757, under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Aikin, the Rev. John Holt, and the venerable Dr. Taylor, he was enrolled the first student of that well known seminary; and, after prosecuting his studies there, with diligence and reputation, for the space of above three years, he removed to the University of Edinburgh, at which place he employed the winters of 1761, 62, and 64, in close application to the study of physic. In further pursuit of medical improvement he visited London; and, during his residence in that city, in the winter of 1763, he had the opportunity of pursuing with greater intimacy a connection which had subsisted some time with Hugh Lord Willoughby, of Parham. Having, through the medium of their common friend, the Rev. John Seddon, of War-

rington, been honoured with the friendship of that excellent and accomplished nobleman, he became the constant companion of his walks, and the familiar partaker of his social and literary entertainments. The warm attachment of his noble patron, the uncommon advantages he derived from his freedom of access to a mansion which was the resort of the most celebrated literati of the day, and the occasions thereby offered of conciliating the esteem and confidence of persons of the first consequence and rank, all conspired to suggest to him the resolution of fixing his residence in the metropolis. This project, however, was relinquished on the sudden death of his highly valued friend ; an event which to his latest moment he never recollected but with the tenderest expressions of regret. During the course of this winter, at an unusually early period of life, he was unanimously elected Fellow of the Royal Society of London.

Having passed some time at Paris, Hamburg, and various other places on the Continent, but principally Lyden, at which university he graduated in the year 1765, he returned to his native town, where he resided for a few months, and, on the 24th of March, 1766, he married Elizabeth, only daughter of Nathaniel Bassnett, Esq. merchant, of London, a lady of excellent sense, unblemished worth, and the most studious attention to every conjugal and domestic duty.

The threatre of Dr. Percival's professional practice now became the object of his serious deliberations ; and, after a variety of plans proposed and rejected, his choice was ultimately directed to Manchester, in which town he settled in the year 1767, and there continued, till his death, in the unremitting exercise of his profession.

Of his eminence in that profession little needs to be said. His merits as a practitioner of physic, and not less the benefits conferred by him on medical science, are too generally understood, and confessed, to require any minuteness of detail. A quick penetration, a discriminating judgment, a patient attention, a comprehensive knowledge, and, above all, a solemn sense of responsibility, were the endowments which so conspicuously fitted him at once to discharge the duties and to extend the boundaries of the healing art. His external accomplishments and manners were alike happily adapted to the offices of his profession. To an address peculiarly engaging from its uncommon mixture of dignity, respectfulness, and ease was united a gravity of deportment that bespoke the seriousness of interest, not the gloom of apprehension. The expression of a benign sympathy, which on every occasion of distress his features borrowed from the genuine feelings of the kindest commiseration, presented him likewise the comforter in the physician. And the topics of encouragement and consolation, which the goodness of his heart and the

ample stores of his cultivated mind so abundantly supplied, enabled him to administer relief to the wounds of the spirit with no less efficacy than to the diseases of the body. In truth, the admirable picture so lately drawn by his own masterly pencil, in that Volume in which he has delineated the requisites and qualifications of the medical practitioner,* displays the most exact portraiture of himself: and whilst he there depicted those excellencies of the medical character, which he approved in theory, he unconsciously but described those which he every day exemplified in practice. Indeed, in that most valuable Treatise, which he expressly dedicated as a "Paternal Legacy" to a much loved son, and which may now be regarded as his bequest to his brethren of the faculty, and to the public, he has left behind him a monument of professional integrity and honour, which will exhibit him to those of after times, what his life and conduct have done to his contemporaries, one of the worthiest objects of their admiration and esteem.

As a literary character Dr. Percival held a distinguished rank. His earlier publications were devoted to enquiries exclusively medical and philosophical, and have long obtained for their author high and deserved reputation amongst the learned, from the powers which they evince of sagacious invention, cautious investigation, and scien-

* Medical Ethics, or a Code of Institutes and Precepts, adapted to the professional conduct of Physicians and Surgeons, published by Dr. Percival in the year 1803.

tific research. The subjects which occupied his pen, in later years, were of a nature the most congenial to his feelings. And in the several volumes of *Father's Instructions*, and *Moral Dissertations*, which have appeared at different periods, through a space of twenty-five years, and which were originally conceived with the design of exciting in the hearts of his children a desire of knowledge and a love of virtue, there is to be found as much of pure stile, genuine feeling, refined taste, apt illustration, judicious enforcement, and pious reflection, as can easily be discovered, in the same compass, in any didactic composition. Perhaps it is not in the reach of human ingenuity to execute such a work in a manner better adapted to its object; and certainly within the range of human selection, there can be no object of higher importance than that which the author held in view, the intellectual, moral, and religious improvement of the rising generation. This, indeed, was the object always nearest to his thoughts. To this he directed the powers of his fancy, the stores of his memory, and the results of his learning. And hence these invaluable productions, whilst they are intelligible and impressive to the young, are edifying to the adult, and interesting and delightful to all. In every sentiment the author is felt, because he speaks from the heart; in every precept he persuades, because utility is his end; in every argument he convinces, because truth

is his guide. The merit of this collective work can be duly appreciated only by those who have carefully perused its several parts; and of those who have, it may safely be pronounced, that not one capable of a relish for what is beautiful in writing, and just in thinking, has ever closed these volumes without finding his heart improved, his judgment rectified, and his taste refined. In addition to the works already mentioned, numerous, papers, on various subjects, all bearing the impress of the clearest understanding and the most perspicuous style, have at sundry times adorned the pages of the publications of the Literary and Philosophical Society at Manchester — an institution to whose establishment and fame he contributed in an eminent degree, and which did not cease to manifest its grateful sense of his merits by the continued appointment of him to the Presidency, from the date of its incorporation. Several smaller pieces also, some of them indicating the command of an elegant and classical latinity, have been handed about amongst his friends: and it were to be wished that in some complete Collection of the author's productions these may be permitted to see the light.

But though the writings of Dr. Percival are such, and so many, as must secure to his name the most honourable and lasting remembrance in the republic of letters, yet they are far from conveying an adequate idea of his literary

qualifications and his various accomplishments as a Scholar. A constitution originally delicate and unequal to laborious exertion, whether mental or corporeal ; frequent and periodical returns of acute headache, and above all, a weakness in the visual organs, which for the greater part of his life, rendered him, both in reading and writing, entirely dependant upon the aid of others : these, joined to the occupations of a profession, in which his celebrity allowed him but few intervals of leisure, formed a combination of circumstances in every way unfavourable to the pursuits of an author. And we should have reason to wonder, that, with such obstacles to be surmounted, he could have given so much to the press, if we did not know that his time was always arranged with the most exact regularity, and that he felt it to be a duty, that no part of it should be expended but for purposes of moral usefulness, or healthful relaxation. The facility of composition, also, which he enjoyed, converted that into an amusement which to others might be an effort ; especially as for the most part his pen was employed but to give form and extension to those trains of thought which were familiar to his mind and endeared to his reflection.

The communications of epistolary intercourse and the short exercises of literary conversation were, however, the best suited to those scattered vacancies, those *subseciva tempora* which alone remained from his various avocations.

In these he delighted to indulge; and in these he displayed with peculiar felicity those pure and natural ornaments of diction in which he excelled. His Correspondence was diversified and diffusive, extending to the most eminent and worthy amongst the literary characters of the age; although for many years almost unavoidably conducted through the medium of an amanuensis, to whom he always dictated with a prompt fluency and a classical exactness.

In social discussion he possessed powers of a very uncommon stamp, combining the accuracy of science and the strictest precision of method with the graces of a copious and unstudied elocution. " Learning with some is the parent of mental obscurity, and the multiplicity of ideas which have been acquired by severe study, serves only to produce perplexity and confusion. But his thoughts were always ready at command, and he engaged with perspicuity on every topic of discourse, because he saw at one view all its relations and analogies to those branches of knowledge with which he was already acquainted."* Conversation he deemed the most effective instrument of mental improvement. But whilst he, therefore, lost no opportunity of directing it to the best and

* This passage, so truly descriptive of himself, is taken from an elegant "Tribute" paid by him to the memory of a respected friend, Charles de Polier, Esq. and inserted in the first volume of the *Memoirs of the Manchester Society*.

most instructive topics, the native cheerfulness of his mind, ever at peace with itself and with the world, did not fail to bestow upon it a liveliness and zest by those playful and seasonable sallies of delicate and unoffending pleasantry, which so strongly marked the sweetness of his temper, the innocence of his heart, and the nicety of his discretion. To the colloquial ornaments with which he was thus eminently gifted, was superadded the polish of a refined urbanity, the joint result of innate benevolence, and of early and habitual intercourse with the most improved classes of society. They alone, in short, who have had the happiness to experience the delights of his converse, can form any just conception of its attractive pleasures and its ameliorating virtues.

But highly as this excellent man was to be admired and loved for his engaging manners, and his intellectual endowments, these sentiments are yet more forcibly excited by the exalted qualities which dignified and embellished his Moral nature. These were the precious gems that shed around his character that lustre which made him a public light. From these did all his attainments derive their sterling value. To these were all his other qualifications rendered subservient ; and from their pervading influence did he acquire that secret charm, which gave him an irresistible ascendant over the affections of all who knew him. A strict probity, and an inviolable love of truth,

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were perhaps the most conspicuous in the assemblage of these moral graces. From these, his whole conduct derived a purity and elevation, such as could spring only from a mind in which the finest sensibilities of virtue had ever remained unhurt by the consciousness of dishonour. To transmit to his children this precious inheritance, guarded against contamination by every persuasion of precept, and every allurements of example, was a principal study of his life. And to secure to them the permanent enjoyment of this valuable deposit, he laboured unceasingly to inculcate that which he truly deemed the foundation and the fence of every virtue, the principle of religion. Indeed, to impress this principle upon the understandings and the hearts of all to whom his conversation or his writings could extend, was to him the first duty and the highest glory. And it was delightful to behold a man distinguished in a profession in which, whether truly or not, religious scepticism has been supposed to prevail; prominent in the walks of philosophy, which in latter times has too often but misled her votaries; and honoured in all the literary circles of an age whose peculiar pride it has been to undermine established opinions; lending the whole weight and moment of his name and talents to the maintenance of genuine religion, and the support of Christian virtue. Educated a Dissenter, he steadily retained the principles of rational dissent, without descending

to be a partizan. Solicitous upon all occasions to make the Scripture the interpreter and the test of religious truth, he had imbibed from the stated perusal of the sacred volume, an enlightened familiarity with those great vital verities which must lie at the foundation of the creed of every sincere Christian. His religious tenets were therefore revered by the truly good and candid of all denominations ; and by some of the most eminent divines and worthiest prelates of the established church his correspondence and friendly intercourse were highly esteemed, and his sentiments and opinions not unfrequently cited and recommended.

But neither was his a religion that could rest in speculation. It was transfused into his life, and governed all his actions ; its purifying power not only extending to his open intercourse with the world, but penetrating the retirement of the closet, and the secret recesses of the heart.

That benevolence which Christianity so forcibly inculcates , was with him not less an impulse of nature, than a discharge of duty. Alive to the most generous sympathies, he participated with cordial concern in whatever affected the interests of a fellow creature. But whilst his philanthropy was of that expansive quality, that would, if possible, comprehend in its embrace, the whole human family of the one great common Parent ; it was

not allowed to waste itself in vague generalities and unprofitable aspirations; but was invigorated and rendered daily and hourly productive by the particular and local exercises of its beneficence. The many useful Institutions in the town and vicinity of Manchester, of which he was the patron or promoter; the readiness with which his attention and his counsels were afforded to the difficulties and the emergencies of his neighbours; the alacrity with which the services of courtesy and good-will were performed by him, towards all within the range of his acquaintance; and the activity of his exertions for the welfare of those, to whom the closer ties of intimacy supplied yet stronger claims; all evinced the disinterested ardour, and practical energies of his social affections. In those charities, which may be termed patriotic, he was exceeded by none. His sensibility to every infringement of the honour and the liberties of his country, was of the liveliest nature; but whilst he breathed the purest sentiments of independence, he always held in view the fundamental principles of legitimate authority. To him the seductions of a fallacious freedom could present no charms. His discerning eye easily discovered the true bounding line between liberty and licentiousness, between innovation and improvement: and he stood at all times equally removed, and equally averse from the debasements of despotism, and the machinations of faction. Of the

Christian charities his breast was peculiarly susceptible. Every resemblance to divine goodness most powerfully excited his regard : and to the man possessed of moral worth, he felt himself irresistibly drawn, as to a brother. But whilst his benevolence emanated thus widely on all surrounding objects, its radiant " flame," to use his own expressions, " became more warm and bright, to those which were most near, in proportion to the diffusion of its lustre." And in the relations of husband, friend, and parent, all the kindly affections of his nature were kindled to their highest fervour.

If ever man could be said to have lived for his children and his friends rather than for himself, it was he. So unceasing his attentions to their interests, so tender his anxiety for their welfare, so assiduous his endeavours for their improvement, that they seemed almost to have mingled with his consciousness, and to have formed a part of his very essence. The endearments with which his instructions were conveyed, the lenient remonstrances with which youthful errors were reprov'd, the tempered indulgence with which the reins of paternal authority were guided, procured for him from his children their fondest regard and most friendly confidence ; at the same time that the known firmness of his rectitude and his indignant abhorrence of every deliberate deviation from principle, inspired them with an awe, which, whilst it

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impressed upon their hearts the strongest fear of offending, served to heighten yet more the feelings of virtuous attachment and reverential love. With such a rare combination of transcendant qualities, with a character in which the most placid virtues were associated with the brightest intellectual endowments and the most inflexible integrity, softened and embellished by the most conciliating accomplishments, with the fairest reputation derived from a long and uninterrupted course of honourable and meritorious conduct, with the esteem, the love, and the veneration not only of those immediately connected with him in the bonds of amity and kindred, but of all who were the witnesses of his actions, and capable of appreciating his deserts; with the complacency of mind which accompanies the consciousness of well-doing, and the peculiar self gratulation arising from the contemplation of the rich fruits returned to his paternal culture, in the enlarged understandings, the regulated affections, the confirmed principles, and the amiable manners of those, whom it had been his great business to form to knowledge and to goodness:—it seems as if such a state, without alloy, were too prosperous for man; and it was his lot to experience some severely afflicting providences in that quarter where his tenderest affections were engaged. But here the consolations of a Christian hope and the unshaken assurances of Divine goodness were his refuge and support.

And whilst he bowed in resigned submission to that searching discipline with which it was the good pleasure of his God to exercise his faith, and with the pious Job was enabled to praise and glorify that Being who hath both given and taken away ; he turned with grateful contentment to those numerous domestic blessings which were yet permitted him to enjoy, and which he continued with pious thankfulness and quickened sensibility to cherish and improve to the last moment of his existence. Thus the severity of his trials but proved the stability of his virtue ; and his probationary sorrows, by softening his devotion and refining all his best dispositions, served only to render him a fitter recipient for the felicities of another world, and a brighter example for the edification of this.

We would gladly indulge in the melancholy satisfaction arising from the detailed contemplation of excellence so diversified. But the matter is too abundant, and the proposed limits too contracted for such delineation. We must, therefore, take our leave of this exemplary character with this short and imperfect summary.

He was an author without vanity, a philosopher without pride, a scholar without pedantry, a student without seclusion, a moralist without moroseness, a patriot without faction, and a Christian without guile. Affable in his manners, courteous in his conversation, dignified in his deportment, cheerful in his temper, warm in his affections,

steady in his friendship, mild in his resentments, and unshaken in his principles. The grand object of his life was usefulness, and the grand spring of all his actions was religion. With such a singular union of estimable endowments, and with scarcely one distinguishable failing to cast a shade upon their collective splendor, who that knew him can avoid dwelling upon his memory with pleasure? a pleasure indeed accompanied with sensations of the most poignant regret, yet still such as prompts the heart to vent itself in the exclamation—

“ HEU ! QUANTO MINUS EST

“ CUM RELIQUIS VERSARI

“ QUAM TUI MEMINISSE.”

W. MAGEE, D. D. Trin. Coll. Dublin.

S Russell, Printer, Manchester.



